

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE

SUITE 2320 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6301
(202) 225-6371
TTY: (202) 226-4410
<http://www.house.gov/science/welcome.htm>

May 11, 2006

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Mr. President:

I know you understand how important accurate weather forecasting is to this nation's economy and to the lives of our citizens. I want to draw your attention to a troubled weather satellite acquisition involving the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA) and the Department of Defense/U.S. Air Force (DOD).

Cost and schedule problems with the tri-agency National Polar Orbiting Environmental Satellite System (NPOESS) have grown so large that it has breached the 25% Nunn-McCurdy cost-growth ceiling. By law, any acquisition that exceeds 25% cost growth at the Department of Defense must be thoroughly reviewed. For the Department to continue with the acquisition, the Department must certify that the program is essential to our nation's security, that no less-cost options exist and that the cost and schedule have a high degree of reliability.

I am afraid that DOD, narrowly applying these filters from the perspective of the Department, may decide to cancel its participation in NPOESS. Because the satellite system is a joint acquisition, with costs shared equally by NOAA and the Air Force, the withdrawal by DOD would effectively collapse the program. NOAA simply doesn't have the resources to go it alone in continuing this already expensive and troubled acquisition. However, it cannot possibly be in the nation's interests to see our premier weather forecasting agency left crippled by a lack of polar orbiting weather capability. Those are the stakes in this Nunn-McCurdy decision. The costs in business losses and property damage of a severe degradation in our five- to seven-day weather forecasts could easily run into tens of billions of dollars. Our transportation, agriculture and energy industries, among others, would all be adversely impacted by this situation.

I ask that you engage the White House in the Nunn-McCurdy process to guarantee that a broad perspective on our nation's security is used by DOD in their review and certification process. It is too late to do anything about the management failures that created this situation. It is probably too late to act in a way that will eliminate

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data gaps for National Weather Service needs. It is not too late to avoid compounding those mistakes by decisions that may lead to the collapse of the entire program, exacerbating the gaps we are likely to suffer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bart Gordon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bart" and last name "Gordon" clearly distinguishable.

BART GORDON
Ranking Member